



Immigrants' Voice through Protest Politics in Canada and Australia

KEYWORDS

Immigration; protest activities; political repression; pre-migration experiences

WHAT'S THE STORY?

This project examines what leads immigrants to participate in political protest activities. The central hypothesis is that newcomers from politically repressive countries of origin will be least likely to become active in protest activities in their new country of residence. Results strongly confirm this expectation.

Using surveys from Canada and Australia, Bilodeau finds three key differences between local populations and immigrants with respect to protesting. (1) Immigrants are less likely than local populations to protest. (2) The repressiveness of the regime an immigrant comes from is a central factor in predicting whether immigrants participate in protests. (3) The reasons that local populations abstain from protest activities are not the same for immigrants.

Importantly, Bilodeau is able to show that the time an immigrant has spent in the host country does not change their propensity to protest. Recent arrivals are quite similar to

well-established immigrants with respect to protest participation. Moreover, length of residence does not diminish the influence of the country of origin with respect to protesting. Experience in a politically repressive country is central to understanding why immigrants avoid protests, regardless of how far removed that experience may be.

HEADLINES

Pre-Migration Experiences

Immigrants from repressive regimes are least likely to join protest activities in their new host country. The more repressive the country of origin the less likely protest participation becomes.

Learning not to Protest

Highly educated immigrants are least likely to take part in protest activities. For the local population, however, education increases the probability of joining protests.

What Makes You Protest Averse?

Income, education, gender, and group membership are important predictors of protest participation among local populations.

For local populations in Canada and Australia, higher education, higher income, and active participation in community groups all increase the likelihood of taking part in political protest activities. Higher education, higher income, and group membership do not, however, make immigrants more likely to join protests. For them, holding materialist values and their pre-migration experience in repressive regimes dictate orientations toward protesting.

HOW WE DID IT?

This project is based on survey data from Canada (2000) and Australia (2004). The Canadian surveys were collected as part of the *World Values Survey* (WVS). The Australian surveys are a component of the *Australian Election Study* (AES). Approximately 300 immigrants and 1000 respondents from the local population are included in each sample.

For protest participation, each person was asked if they have taken part in activities such as signing a petition, attending a public march or demonstration, or joining a boycott. If the answer was yes then the respondent was considered a participant in protest politics.

The political repression measure is derived from *The Freedom in the World Country Ratings*. Bilodeau generates a single repression score for all countries by combining indices of civil liberties and political rights. For immigrants in the sample, pre-migration repression experience is the average score for

their country of origin during the 15-year period prior to migration.

FOR PUBLIC DEBATE

What does it mean for democracy if immigrants tend avoid expressing a political voice through non-conventional forms of political action? Is it a symptom of broader disengagement from the public sphere? Or are immigrants simply participating in ways not considered by this study? These questions will become increasingly pertinent for public debate as immigration rates continue to grow and if these non-conventional forms of participation continue to play an important role in politics.

LEARN MORE

Bilodeau Antoine. 2008. "Immigrants' Voice through Protest in Canada and Australia: Assessing the Impact of Pre-Migration Political Repression." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34(6): 975-1002.

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